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ABSTRACT

This idea book comes from projects undertaken by American Association of Retired Persons (AARP) chapters and state and local retired teachers associations around the United States. The projects described range from simple acts performed by one volunteer to elaborate schemes funded by corporations, from involvement in existing programs to the establishment of new ones. The book is loosely organized by the ages of the people served. Projects devoted to school age children are introduced first, followed by those targeting adults to those promoting lifelong learning. Each chapter introduces a general area of concern and then discusses ways AARP chapters and retired teachers associations have stepped in to fill these needs. The amount of time involved, the number of volunteers needed, and the required resources are also described. Additional resources are noted for further reference. (EH)

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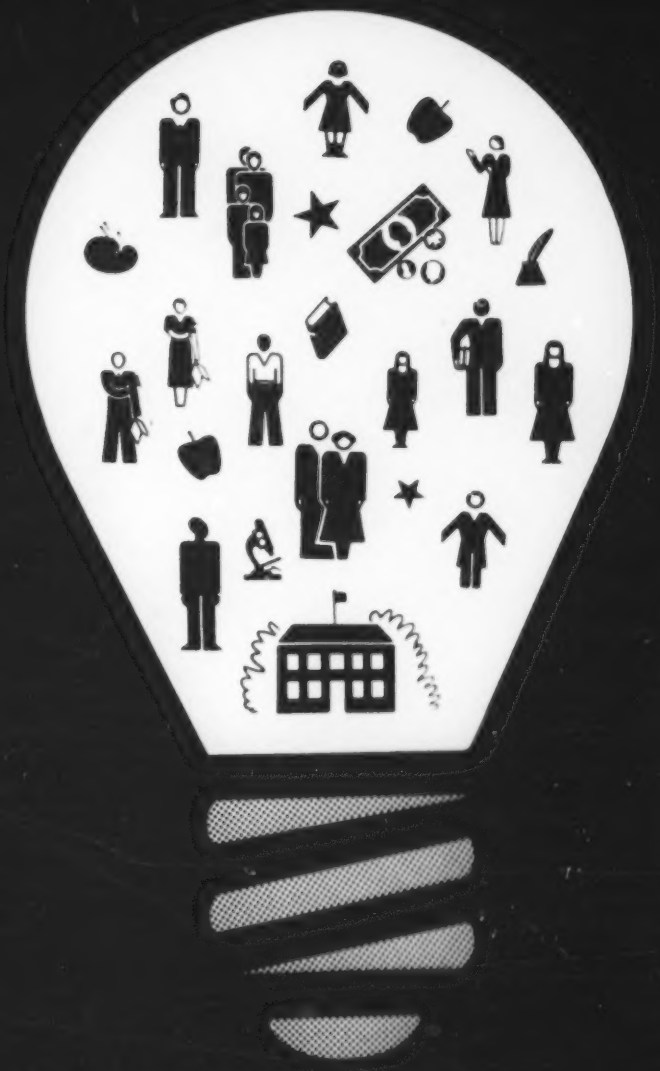

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SO 027 389

A GUIDE FOR VOLUNTEERS

Published by the
American Association of Retired Persons

EDUCATION PROJECTS
IDEA BOOK

A GUIDE FOR VOLUNTEERS

Published by the
Special Projects Section
Program Coordination and Development Department

American Association of Retired Persons

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I. INTRODUCTION

The numbers are startling:

*More than 25 percent of American students fail to graduate from high school each year;

*More than 50 percent of Americans have limited reading ability or cannot read at all; and

*More than three million American adults have never attended school.

These statistics affect everyone. Behind them lie decreasing competitiveness in international trade, increasing dependence on social services, low self-esteem, and other immeasurable ills. Robert Maxwell, Immediate Past President of the American Association of Retired Persons (AARP), is emphatic on the subject. "In my estimation, everything that is wrong with our society—poverty, crime, unemployment—all these can be traced to a lack of education," he told participants at the 1990 AARP Biennial Convention.

Who can solve America's educational crisis? Teachers face workloads far beyond their capacities and resources far below their needs. The increase of single-parent homes and working mothers has dried up the traditional pool of volunteers. But one group does have the time and willingness to help meet this challenge. Older people, with their lifetimes of experience, are perfect candidates for volunteering in education. They can teach Americans of all ages to read, help teachers in the classroom, share professional skills and personal memories, support struggling students in many ways, or simply listen to children talk about their problems with school and life. This guide will tell you how it can be done.

The ideas in this book come from projects undertaken by members of AARP chapters and state and local retired teachers associations around the country. Although many chapters and units are involved in projects similar to those described below, we chose the examples given from among hundreds of responses to our 1991 survey. The projects described range from simple acts performed by one volunteer to elaborate schemes funded by corporations, from involvement in existing programs to the establishment of new ones. In some cases, volunteers work directly with learners; in others, they help indirectly. The book is loosely organized by the age of the people served. It begins with projects devoted to school age children, moves on to those targeting adults, and finishes with those promoting lifelong learning. Each chapter introduces a gener-

al area of concern and then discusses ways chapters and retired teachers associations have stepped in to fill these needs. You'll learn how much time, how many volunteers, and what kinds of resources you'll need. You'll find out how to recruit, train, and evaluate volunteers as well as how to fund projects. And at the end of each chapter, you'll see a list of resources guiding you to more information.

Use this publication to initiate a project based on one of these models or to get involved in one of the organizations listed. Feel free to share this book with others in your community who share your desire to promote education. And enjoy the feeling of helping others learn.

II. Programs Involving Volunteers With Children

Serving In Schools

As school funding decreases drastically, class size in American classrooms has skyrocketed. Teachers confront classrooms jam-packed full of students whose needs may vary widely. Students who are learning disabled, abused, gifted, physically different, non-English speakers, or just average, all vie for attention. Hard-pressed to cover even the basics, educators can no longer guarantee individual attention to their students. Many children fare no better at home. Single parents and couples who both work often cannot spare the time to supervise their children's education. As more and more young people are forced to endure poverty, drugs, violence, homelessness, and other forms of instability, their capacity to learn diminishes even further.

You can help lighten the load of today's educators. Choose the age group that interests you most and get involved. Work with students on academic subjects or guide them in specialized skills like computing, carpentry, or chess. Escort them on field trips or monitor the playground. Help them produce the school newspaper, yearbook, or literary magazine. Or set up a project based on one of those described in this book. You don't need teaching experience or even a college degree, just a willingness to help young learners learn.

Ways You Can Help

Serve as a classroom grandparent. Sometimes the reassuring presence of an older person is enough to help students flourish. This thought motivated an El Paso, Texas, elementary school administrator to ask members of Vista Hills AARP Chapter 3994 to become classroom grandparents. Six volunteers accepted and were each assigned a kindergarten class. At the beginning of each school year, they meet with teachers to discuss the program's goals. They then spend about two hours a week with their classes, reading stories, playing games, helping with classwork, and just talking with the children. Often the volunteers initiate special projects, such as teaching the children to make animals out of folded paper. "You can't lose with kindergartners," reports one volunteer, "They love to do everything!" Volunteers also attend back-to-school nights, where they get a chance to meet the real families of their "grandchildren." Volunteers who have participated in the program since its beginning in 1987 report that ties between "grandparents" and students remain quite close. "I have third graders who were in my kindergarten class come back to visit me," says one. "It's a real ego trip."

Help Teachers Teach. Just because they're retired doesn't mean that members of Hawaii's Kauai Retired Teachers Association don't want to be back in school. In response to recruiting efforts by the local Retired Senior Volunteer Program (RSVP), about 30 of the unit's members have returned to schools all over the island as volunteers . Striving for maximum coverage, an RSVP coordinator assigns volunteers to schools serving students who range in age from kindergarten to high school. Volunteers draw on their experience as educators to help in any way they can. Some, for instance, act as classroom aides. Assigned to specific teachers, they tutor students, read to them and listen to them read, and lead small groups of children in activities. They also photocopy materials, create bulletin board displays, and even help teachers with their paperwork. Other volunteers work as library aides. They work at the check-out counter, help students locate books, and update card catalogs. Volunteers typically give one morning a week.

Adopt a school. For Pennsylvania's West Park AARP Chapter 4037, adopting a school means all of the above and even more. The adoption was the idea of the chapter's community service committee chairperson, a former volunteer coordinator for the Philadelphia school system. Remembering how effective it had been to get businesses to focus their volunteer energies on specific schools, Dorothy Marshall applied the same strategy to her fellow chapter members. She enlisted the help of a school principal she knew, inviting her to address the chapter and encourage members to volunteer. Soon she had convinced the chapter to adopt an elementary school only two blocks away from their meeting place.

At the beginning of each school year, Marshall distributes a list of the different volunteer opportunities in the school. Would-be volunteers check off activities that interest them and note how much time they're willing to give. "It's always easy to get help on specific things," notes Marshall. She cites as examples an annual book sale the chapter co-sponsors with the school and the city-wide testing that members monitor twice a year. But ongoing projects are also popular. This year, for example, 15 classroom aides are helping out in classrooms two hours a week. Three tutors work one-on-one with students who need help. Other volunteers work in the library, help the student choir, and work with teachers to beautify the school and its grounds. All volunteer activities occur during school hours. Even chapter members who aren't directly involved in the program help out. One year, for instance, 20 members of the chapter's legislative committee took 20 children, a teacher, two school staff members, and a parent to the state capitol

to visit their representatives' offices. Other chapter members raised $30,000 for computers by saving their cash register receipts during a local store's promotion.

The program has been such a success that Marshall no longer coordinates the whole thing. Now each category of service, such as the book fair or classroom aides, has its own chairperson to match volunteers to needs. A liaison within the school keeps track of what kind of help is needed and also maintains a sign-up sheet for teachers who want volunteer escorts on school trips. Says Marshall, "The children love it, and the teachers do, too."

Resources

To find out whether programs like these exist in local schools, call the office of your school district's superintendent and ask for the volunteer coordinator. This person can put your skills and the time you have available to use in ongoing programs or at special events. Also check with your local volunteer clearinghouse, AARP chapter, retired teachers association, and other service organizations. Be sure to ask about orientation, training, and evaluation.

The Retired Senior Volunteer Program (RSVP) is another good source of information about existing projects. A federal program, RSVP supports 748 volunteer projects sponsored by local service organizations in every state, the District of Columbia, the Virgin Islands, and Puerto Rico. Volunteers, who must be retired and over 60, receive a brief orientation and in-service instruction from local project directors. Most work four hours a week. The program provides accident and liability insurance to volunteers on assignment; volunteers may also receive reimbursement for expenses. Check the telephone directory for a program in your area. For general information, write to RSVP's headquarters in care of ACTION, 1100 Connecticut Avenue, NW, 6th Floor, Washington, DC 20525 or call (202) 606-4853.

If no programs exist in your area, you may wish to establish one. If your proposed program involves more than one school, contact the school board or school superintendent. If you have a specific school in mind, contact the principal. Make an appointment to discuss needs and what you're willing to do. Ask what kinds of training opportunities exist. Many school boards which have volunteer programs offer training and orientation for volunteers. If these aren't available, ask if teachers are available to orient and train volunteers about classroom needs and procedures.

AARP publishes a free guidebook called *Becoming a School Partner* (D13527). Send your name and address to AARP Fulfillment, 601 E Street, NW, Washington, DC 20049.

The National Association of Partners in Education (NAPE) can provide the technical assistance you need to set up a program. Devoted to promoting partnerships among business, community, and education,

NAPE offers its members training, a monthly newsletter, a quarterly magazine, awards, and a catalog of publications. *A Practical Guide to Creating and Managing School/Community Partnerships* and *School Volunteer Programs: Everything You Need to Know to Start or Improve Your Program* might be particularly helpful. Write to NAPE at 209 Madison Street, Suite 401, Alexandria, VA 22314 or call (703) 836-4880.

The National VOLUNTEER Center can also help. The only national organization designed solely to support volunteerism, the center provides a quarterly magazine, a bimonthly newsletter, a catalog of publications and related items, and access to a volunteerism library to its members. Write to 1111 North 19th Street, Suite 500, Arlington, VA 22209 or call (703) 276-0542.

HELPING YOUNG READERS

A young child has trouble reading. Without help, the problem will grow worse and worse as the years pass. Because each year's work builds on the succesful completion of the previous year's studies, the child who has just enough skills to pass on to the next grade will eventually derail. Once he or she leaves the sheltered confines of a small reading group, the student will be forced to apply limited reading skills to an entire range of academic subjects. At that point, a problem with reading becomes one with school in general. If the child manages to stay in school, he or she may become one of the shockingly many high school graduates who leave school unable to read. Catching these children today is the best way of preventing them from being tomorrow's illiterates. Even children who are accomplished readers need encouragement. In an era when the United States Department of Education estimates that the average kindergartner has spent more time watching television than it takes to earn a college degree, reading faces powerful competition for the attention of young people. Youngsters must learn that reading is a joy, not a drudgery. Although the problem is immense, possible solutions can be easy and fun for both children and volunteers. You don't even need any special training, just a love of reading. Consult the project descriptions below for ideas about how you can help.

How to Get Involved

Listen to children read. At one elementary school in Connecticut, all hands go up when teachers asks first graders, "Who wants to read?" So reports Brownstone AARP Chapter 2826 member Dorothy Hay, who set up a reading program in 1981. Approached by a first grade teacher, Hay agreed to help first graders learn to read and quickly set about recruiting additional volunteers from the chapter and a local senior center. She now coordinates about 50 volunteers, spending about two-and-a-half hours

a week on scheduling. To maximize the children's contact with all kinds of older people, Hay rotates volunteers through the classrooms. Each day, two volunteers work with five first grade classrooms. Teachers send children out into the hall one at a time to read whatever they're working on with a volunteer for about 15 minutes. Although volunteers do help with unfamiliar words, mostly they just listen. Twice a year, the volunteers and students have parties for each other. "Lots of the children don't have grandparents or anybody else to give them full attention," says Hay. "The main thing is that we're enthusiastic, supportive, and helpful. We tell them, 'It's nice to learn to read.'"

Read to children. Teaching children the joys of reading is the sole purpose of a Guest Reader Program in the public school system of one Maryland county. Initiated and coordinated by the school system's reading coordinator, the program draws on about 40 members of the Anne Arundel Retired Teachers Association. Each year, the coordinator collects the names of volunteers willing to go into schools to read their favorite children's book, poem, or short story. The coordinator then puts together a directory listing volunteers, classifying them by the age group or type of class they wish to serve. The directory goes to all the county's schools, which use the publication to plan reading events. Some schools sponsor reading months featuring different guest readers each week; others designate reading days packed with a whole roster of guest readers. Volunteers read from materials provided by teachers or bring in their own favorites. Some even dress as characters from the books they read, adding to the fun. One volunteer reports that he reads part of a longer book to older children, giving them just enough of the plot to inspire them to go out and read the book themselves. To reinforce the idea that reading is an important activity enjoyed by important people, the program supplements its older volunteers with celebrity readers from the community like mayors or members of Congress, or the state legislature.

Correspond with students. Interested in a program that could fill your members' mailboxes with colorful drawings and cheerful letters from youngsters? If so, follow in the footsteps of Illinois' Decatur Area Retired Teachers Association. Recruited by a school superintendent, unit member Elizabeth Braden developed a Pen Pal Program that pairs 104 members with second, third, and fourth graders at a local school. The program gives students a chance to practice their reading and writing skills at the same time they strengthen intergenerational ties.

Each fall, Braden recruits volunteers, drawing on local service clubs, religious organizations, and the Retired Senior Volunteer Program, as well as the unit. She also runs a small

article about the program in the local newspaper. Volunteers register by sending a signed statement reading, "I will write to my pen pal once a month beginning in September or October," to Braden. Braden also sends teachers and volunteers informal program handbooks, which describe the program in detail and outline rules like the one forbidding volunteers to send money to their pen pals. All of Braden's activities occur during the two hours a week that she has the use of a space at the regional office of education. Once the school year begins, the pen pals take over. Each month until May, volunteers write to their assigned pen pals in care of the school. Students respond with letters and drawings created during special class sessions. Teachers use school mail to send the children's letters and a log of volunteers' letters to Braden at the school office, where she sends the letters out at the superintendent's expense. At the end of the year, pen pals have a party. Although volunteers spend only minutes a year, children receiving what are often their first letters learn firsthand how exciting reading can be.

Resources

To find out whether programs like these exist in your local schools, call the superintendent's office of your school district and ask for the volunteer coordinator. Also check with your local volunteer clearinghouse, AARP chapter, retired teachers association, and other service organizations. If no programs exist, you may wish to establish one. If your proposed project involves many schools, contact the school superintendent or school board. If you have a specific school in mind, contact the principal. Make an appointment to discuss needs and what you're willing to do.

The National Association of Partners in Education (NAPE) publishes *Helping the Child with Learning Disabilities: A School Volunteer's Guide*. Designed especially for volunteers who tutor young readers, this publication gives tips for assessing reading levels and other suggestions. To order the guide, or receive general information about how the association can help you set up a program, write to NAPE at 209 Madison Street, Suite 401, Alexandria, VA 22314 or call (703) 836-4880.

Reading Is Fundamental (RIF) is a reading incentive program that sponsors volunteer projects in public schools all over the country. RIF's national headquarters can give you the name and telephone number of the RIF program in your area and also provide resource materials and technical support. Write to RIF at 600 Maryland Avenue, SW, Suite 500, Washington, DC 20024 or call (202) 287-3257.

The federally funded Retired Senior Volunteer Program (RSVP) includes many literacy programs for disadvantaged children in the 748 volunteer projects it supports in every state, the District of Columbia, the Virgin Islands, and Puerto Rico. Volunteers, who must be retired and over 60, work about four hours a

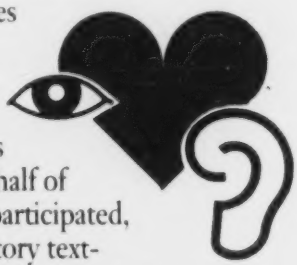
week. Local project directors provide brief orientations and in-service instruction. RSVP provides accident and liability insurance to volunteers on assignment and may reimburse them for expenses. Check the telephone directory for a program in your area. For general information, write RSVP's headquarters in care of ACTION, 1100 Connecticut Avenue, NW, 6th Floor, Washington, DC 20525 or call (202) 606-4853.

Supporting Students With Differences

Children with differences—whether learning disabled, struggling with a language barrier, physically disabled, emotionally distraught, or even incarcerated—require special attention from educators. Yet whether they are in special education classrooms or in regular ones as a result of a 1977 "mainstreaming" law, these students suffer even more than others from today's overcrowded schools. Problems intensify outside the regular education system, such as in juvenile correctional facilities where the United States Department of Education estimates that 85 percent of juvenile offenders have trouble with reading. Denied individual attention, these students sometimes cannot surpass the barriers that make learning more challenging for them. Funding cutbacks have also meant a shortage of resources, such as "talking books" and special education teachers, devoted to these students. You can help in many ways, ranging from donations of money or materials to direct involvement in classrooms or other settings. Take your cue from the projects described below.

How You Can Help

Provide books for visually impaired students. Members of Indiana's Northside AARP Chapter 3767 learned, during a trip to a publisher of "talking books", that prerecorded books for the visually impaired are extremely expensive. The discovery motivated them to donate several hundred dollars drawn from the chapter treasury to a local library for the purchase of some children's books on tape. Members of Wyoming's Fremont Retired Teachers Association have a different solution to the same problem: they make their own. Recruited in 1983 by the State Office for the Visually Impaired, the unit uses cassette tapes and tape recorders provided by the office to create tapes on demand. Teachers place orders with the office, which then requests volunteer readers for each project. Almost half of the unit's members have participated, recording science and history textbooks, novels, and even a horseshoeing manual wanted by a dyslexic young man. The unit's vice president coaches readers, encouraging them to use inflections to avoid a monotone. Once completed, each tape is distributed to its listener and then filed for later use. How long does each tape take to make? Forty-five minutes is about as long as a



voice lasts, reports one reader, who took three weeks to read a science textbook out loud. By that time, you could learn a lot too.

Serve as aides to hearing-impaired students. Funding cuts and teacher lay-offs in a program for hearing-impaired preschoolers have sent volunteers from Pennsylvania's Dormant AARP Chapter 3016 scrambling for more recruits. After working with retarded students for four years, the chapter switched its focus to the program for hearing-impaired youngsters when they learned about the cutbacks. What they tell people who respond to their pleas in the chapter's news bulletin makes the project hard to resist: "This program is more fun than work." The chapter approached a teacher in 1990, and soon six members were each spending about three hours a week with hearing-impaired three- to five-year-olds. Coordinating their visits with the teacher, the volunteers each come on a different day. Once there, they help the teacher by supervising and playing with the children. No special skills are needed, although volunteers report that they've picked up a lot of sign language just by watching. Occasionally, the volunteers treat the children to a picnic or similar activity. Says one volunteer, "It's just like getting grandchildren."

Tutor incarcerated youngsters. "They're felons but you'd never know it," says Lillian Smith of the teenage boys she tutors at a Michigan state correctional facility. Recruited by someone already involved in the program, Smith first visited the facility in 1976. A retired special education teacher and member of Crawford County AARP Chapter 1681, she soon found herself volunteering to help. For about three hours a couple of times a week, she does whatever the facility's teachers ask of her. Usually, this means working one-on-one with kids studying for their high school equivalency exam. "They really want to learn," says Smith. "For a schoolteacher, that's wonderful." Having an older person around also helps the students. "The very worst ones want a grandmother," she notes. "They ask me, 'Can I call you grandmother?' I get away with murder. I tell them, 'Do this!' and they do it, even if their teachers can't get them to. That's one advantage of being old."

Resources

For more information about helping students with visual impairments, write to the American Foundation for the Blind at 15 West 16th Street, New York, NY 10011 or call (212) 620-2000. If you wish to get involved providing taped readings to students, write to Recording for the Blind, Inc., 20 Roszel Road, Princeton, NJ 08540 or call (609) 452-0606.

For information about assisting hearing-impaired students, contact the National Association of the Deaf (NAD). NAD runs a public information center; publishes a newspaper, magazine, and books; and can provide the technical assistance you need

to set up a program. Write to NAD at 814 Thayer Avenue, Silver Spring, MD 20910 or call (301) 587-1788.

To work with incarcerated students, contact your local literacy program to see if a program already exists. Or call the Contact Literacy Program toll-free at (800) 228-8813 for the name and telephone number of the program nearest you. In some locations, the Retired Senior Volunteer Program (RSVP) sponsors projects offering educational and occupational counseling to runaways and first offenders. Volunteers, who must be retired and over 60, work about four hours a week. Local project directors provide brief orientations and in-service instruction; RSVP provides accident and liability insurance to volunteers on assignment and sometimes reimbursement of expenses. For general information, write RSVP's headquarters in care of ACTION, 1100 Connecticut Avenue, NW, 6th Floor, Washington, DC 20525 or call (202) 606-4853.

If you want to set up a new program, contact the volunteer coordinator at the correctional facility you have in mind. The International Association of Justice Volunteerism (IAJV) can provide the technical assistance you need. The association has guidelines for volunteers working in the juvenile and criminal justice systems and publishes a quarterly newsletter and other publications. Write to IAJV in care of the Criminal Justice Institute, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, P.O. Box 786, Milwaukee, WI 53201 or call (414) 229-6092.

If you would like to educate students about people with differences, contact The Kids on the Block, Inc. The organization creates puppets that are themselves different in some way. Designed to break down stereotypes and encourage open discussion in classrooms, the puppets are moved by volunteers who work with prepared scripts. For more information, write to The Kids on the Block, 9385-C Gerwig Lane, Columbia, MD 21046 or call toll-free (800) 368-5437. In Maryland, call (301) 290-9095.

Preventing Dropouts

According to the United States Department of Education, more than 25 percent of the nation's high school students drop out each year. This statistic represents the culmination of years of failure for many students. Teachers plagued by overcrowded classes sometimes allow children to slip by without really learning the skills they need. Counselors are faced with the more immediate problems of teen pregnancy, substance abuse, and violence. But because skills build upon other skills, the situation of a student who has difficulty with basic reading or math will only worsen as his or her schoolwork increases in complexity. Add to this the rockiness of adolescence, and you've got students with low grades, low self-esteem, and a high risk of giving up. Even those who will go on to graduate often need help, since studies

show that 60 percent of high school graduates are unprepared for even entry-level jobs.

Used to failing, students at risk of dropping out need one-on-one help to keep trying. They need encouragement, not punishment. As a volunteer, you can approach the problem from many angles. If you like to work with young children, for instance, you can nip failure in the bud by setting up a self-esteem program like the one described below. If you prefer the more complex challenge of teenagers, work with junior and senior high school students who are already in academic trouble. Sometimes students just need a neutral person to talk to about problems that may not even be academic in nature. Encouragement, not academic expertise, is all that's needed.

Extend a Helping Hand

Set up a self-esteem program. When University City/Clayton AARP Chapter 4048 member Julia Goldstein visited the first grade classroom of her great-grandchild, she spotted a youngster having trouble paying attention. A retired educator, she knew that this child was already a potential dropout. In response, she developed the Partners for Educational Excellence Program (PEEP) and proposed it to the school system. She now works with 50 volunteers she recruited from the chapter and from the Franklin County Retired Teachers Association to take this confidence-building project into first grade classrooms throughout her part of Missouri. At the start of each school year, Goldstein has a meeting to explain the program to new volunteers. Meanwhile, counselors at the schools identify children who need help and match them with volunteers. During the school year, volunteers each spend about an hour a week with their students. They read and discuss stories, play games, talk over problems, and do everything they can to boost students' sense of self-worth. Some members work with more than one child. The reward? For one volunteer, it came when a child who refused to speak in class at the beginning of the year volunteered to recite nursery rhymes to her classmates at the end of the year.

Establish a tutoring program. When a member of Illinois' Aurora Area Retired Teachers Association heard about another city's use of call forwarding to link students and a telephone tutor, she got together with a school superintendent to investigate. The costs, they discovered, were "horrendous." Instead, they set up a more traditional program called Homework Helpers that draws upon the teaching skills of a dozen of the unit's members. Each year before school starts, volunteers attend faculty meetings at two middle schools. "We decided to focus on junior high students," says founder Dorothy Ellis, "because if we catch them there they have a better chance of making it in high school." Once the school year begins, teachers identify students who

seem in danger of failing. After getting parental permission, the children enroll in the unit's program. Two days a week after school, eight to ten students walk to one of two nearby churches that have donated space to the program. At each church they find at least four retired teachers who can help them with math, science, English, and social studies. Although tutoring is often one-on-one, students who are working on the same assignments often work together in small groups. At the end of each session, students snack on cookies baked by the teachers and juice provided by another service organization. The local Kiwanis Club treats students who pass to a year-end trip to an amusement park.

Resources

To find out whether programs like these exist in local schools, call the superintendent's office of your school district and ask for the volunteer coordinator. Also check with your local volunteer clearinghouse, AARP chapter, retired teachers association, and other service organizations. If no programs exist, you may wish to establish one. If your proposed project involves many schools, contact the school superintendent or school board. If you have a specific school in mind, contact the principal. Make an appointment to discuss needs and what you're willing to do.

The National Association of Partners in Education (NAPE) sells a variety of publications designed to help volunteers set up tutoring programs or work with existing ones. *Tips for Tutoring: A Resource Tool for School Volunteer Tutors*, for example, describes techniques that can be used with students from kindergarten to high school age. For a catalog or more information about how NAPE can help you, write to 209 Madison Street, Suite 401, Alexandria, VA 22314 or call (703) 836-4880.

Encouraging Participation In The Arts

When funding cutbacks occur, the first things to go are the so-called "extras" like music, art, and drama programs. Even in the best of times, schools can have trouble coming up with money for costumes, music, paints, and other necessary supplies. And with more mothers working, the traditional volunteers who made costumes, drove children to practice, and assisted teachers with projects are no longer as readily available. Yet children need art. It fosters their creativity, boosts their confidence, and raises their spirits. You can encourage young artists in a variety of ways. You can take a hands-on approach, going into classrooms to teach sculpture, quilting, or anything else you know how to do. You can focus on art appreciation, using materials like the National Gallery of Art's slide shows (see Resources). Or you can help advertise and promote students' concerts, plays, and literary magazines. Even being an audience helps. The project descriptions below will tell you how members of some chapters and units have become patrons of the arts.

How To Get Students Into Art

Be an audience. "You couldn't believe that such tiny people could make such marvelous music!" exclaims June Story of New Hampshire's Dover Area AARP Chapter 611. In an attempt to focus every other meeting on some area of concern to the Association, this program committee chairperson tackles educational and intergenerational concerns simultaneously by inviting young musicians to perform at chapter meetings. At each December meeting, for instance, the chapter invites a school-based glee club to perform. Usually, says Story, they sing "songs that were all the craze when we were young." At the annual dinner in June, they invite an all-violin group comprised of very young children. These performances give students a chance to perform before a real audience and help them gain confidence. The chapter also supports them financially, drawing from its general funds to provide a donation of about $50 to each visiting group to be used for new music or costumes. After a single phone call from the program committee to arrange a time, all the chapter has to do is sit back and enjoy the sound of young musicians honing their skills.

Support student artists. As funding cutbacks increase, it becomes harder and harder for an elementary school in Kansas to keep up its tradition of producing an annual volume of the best writing by fourth graders. But the school can't really break the tradition. The 200-page book inspires such enthusiasm that younger children eagerly anticipate fourth grade so that they, too, can compete with their poetry, essays, and stories. When a recently retired fourth grade teacher explained the situation to the Emporia Area Retired Teachers Association, a half dozen of his fellow unit members stepped in to help. They now donate about $60 each year toward the costs of printing, binding, and distributing copies of the work to the children whose work is published.

Establish a lending library for young dramatists. To support elementary school dramatists and save teachers' time, members of Victoria County Retired Teachers Association and a women's club in Texas have assembled 23 boxes of props and costumes to be used for school performances. Some items, such as a wolf mask and an Indian war bonnet, are purchased from costume shops and other sources. Other items, such as a sword and crown, are made by members. Although the boxes are stored at one school, teachers at any school in the district may check out the items. The school district publishes a newsletter listing what items are available. Teachers can also request that

the two groups buy props and costumes for a specific performance. The unit contributes about $50 a year to add to the supply.

Resources

If you would like to invite young artists to perform for you, contact the principals of local schools and ask for the names of music or drama teachers. Or call the chairpersons of appropriate departments at community colleges, colleges, and universities.

If you would like to work in schools, call the superintendent's office of your school district and ask for the volunteer coordinator. Explain your idea or just ask about the kind of help art teachers need in your area's schools.

AARP's Volunteer Talent Bank (VTB) frequently has requests for volunteers in the arts. This computerized database matches volunteers to positions with Association programs and about a dozen other organizations. Recent requests have included positions as a dance instructor, puppeteer, and crafts demonstrator. Write to VTB in care of AARP, 601 E Street, NW, Washington, DC 20049 or call (202) 434-2277. Or request a Volunteer Registration Packet (D910) from AARP Fulfillment at the same address.

If you're interested in bringing art appreciation into the classroom, request a catalog from the National Gallery of Art. The gallery offers more than 100 slide programs, films, and videocassettes available on a free loan basis to community groups. Subjects range from Egyptian art to art theory. Younger children might especially enjoy a series of films that use music to evoke art's emotional basis. Write to the National Gallery of Art, Department of Extension Programs, Washington, DC 20565 or call (202) 842-6273.

Making History Live

Students often resent their history classes, especially when they're forced to memorize endless dates and read stuffy pages about the past. And in a society in which the generations are often separated by miles of highway, young people don't often get the chance to hear from their grandparents the kinds of stories that interest them and serve as a conduit of cultural continuity. Older volunteers have one big advantage over other volunteers and many teachers when it comes to teaching history—age. Simply by recalling your own memories of times gone by, you can make history live for young people. Supplement the dry facts of history texts with firsthand experiences. Escort classes on field trips to sites of historical interest in your area. Show students photographs, mementos, old tools, and anything else that will show the differences between now and then.

Ways of Revealing the Past

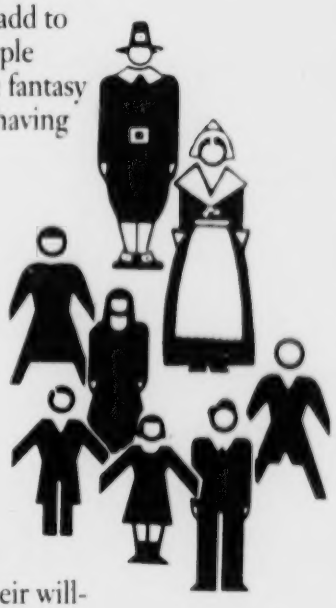
Tell students how life was. Tell your own children how hard your life was during the Depression, Prohibition, or World War II, and they assume you're exaggerating at least a little. But tell the same story to schoolchildren, and they listen raptly and with complete confidence. At least that's what happens to Nicholas Rossetti, community service committee chairperson of New York's Yorktown AARP Chapter 3297. Recruited by a community education consortium affiliated with the school district, chapter members visit middle schools as part of a program called Roots. When teachers want some inside knowledge about a certain era, they call the program coordinator at the consortium's office in a school. The coordinator sends out letters to prospective volunteers, giving them the date and topic requested. Once the class has covered the historical period, a volunteer visits the classroom to answer the list of questions students have prepared. To encourage them to ask whatever they want, the teacher leaves the room and hands the class over to the volunteer. Lectures are avoided in favor of spontaneous responses to questions. Although students tend to start out with questions like "When was your first kiss?", they soon settle down to serious inquiry. They want to know how people got by, what living conditions were like, what kind of entertainment was available, and what kind of jobs people had. Says Rossetti, "It's easy. You just relate your own personal experiences."

Write your own history book. When Colorado's First Lady visited Fremont County AARP Chapter 1841 and urged members to share their stories with the young, she probably had no idea what kind of creative storm she would set off. Within weeks of her talk, the chapter approached a local community college with an idea for a class. The result? The Intergenerational Writing Project. Guided by a writing instructor from the college's continuing education program, 31 chapter members set to work writing stories about homesteading, dug-out homes, and "whiz buggies," as cars were once called. Spanning the 1880s to the 1940s, the stories were designed to be read to young children to give them a sense of their cultural past.

The project's scope grew dramatically when the college received a job training grant from the governor. As part of their training to join the workforce, the authors learned word processing and desktop publishing and put the stories into book form. Participants produced individual booklets containing each author's stories as well as an 82-page anthology. Designed as a resource book for teachers, the anthology features follow-up activities after each story and includes an annotated bibliography of traditional music, games, dances, food, crafts, other historical books for children, community resource people, and ideas for field trips. A local artist helped authors create illustrations; a

photo and biography accompany each author's story. Using the book as a basis, authors often clad in historical garb visit children in day care centers, libraries, and schools to read stories, demonstrate crafts, and talk about how life was. A local radio station even broadcast tapes of the writers reading from their stories. Although the grant money has all been used up, the participants now hold workshops to teach other older people what they learned.

Recreate education's past. Members of Wisconsin's Walworth County Area Retired Teachers Association thought it was a shame that a restored one-room schoolhouse that had been moved to the county fairgrounds was only open during the week-long fair each year. Working with the historical society that operates the schoolhouse, they soon arranged a program that not only maximizes the times the building is open but also makes visiting it a lot of fun. During the fair, fourth and fifth graders who contact the unit's coordinator in advance may visit the school on an individual basis. Unit volunteers dressed in homemade costumes lead small groups through a one-hour session replicating education 1890s-style. During the rest of the year, the project coordinator advertises the program in schools and encourages teachers to bring entire classes to visit during the two months in the fall and two in the spring, when the unit keeps the school open. The seven or eight volunteers involved spend about four hours each time and work from a script prepared by the unit, even though the fact that many of them were once rural teachers makes the script superfluous. Students write on slates, read from old-time readers, and sit at antique desks, among other relics the historical society collects from school attics and other sources. The unit even provides pinafores for the little girls to add to the fun. At the end of the two-hour program, students receive old-fashioned diplomas and visit the historical society's nearby museum to add to their understanding of how people lived. While students enjoy the fantasy elements, the volunteers enjoy having students who say "yes, ma'am" and curtsy.



Resources

If you would like to establish a living history project in schools, contact the school superintendent, school board or the principal of a specific school. Make an appointment to discuss what you're willing to do. Meet with history teach ers to discuss their needs and their willingness to train volunteers.

To write your own history book, check continuing education sources for writing classes. Bookstores and libraries may have books about writing your own history. Check under local history, geneaology, family history, or oral interviews sections.

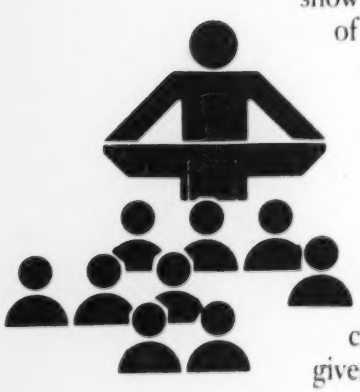
For more information about one-room schoolhouses and other historical sites, contact your local historical society. Check your telephone directory for numbers. Or check guidebooks in your local bookstore or library.

Becoming Professional Role Models

Whenever an older volunteer goes into a school, he or she becomes a positive role model for youngsters. Some programs, however, are specifically designed for this purpose. Some volunteers pass on skills or share experiences. Others discuss their professional careers. In a world in which drug dealers and other criminals are too often glamorized, a volunteer who goes into a classroom to discuss a legitimate profession performs a valuable service. Older students especially will profit from a discussion of specific jobs, and even more so if you add a short seminar on writing a résumé and interviewing to your presentation. The additional benefit comes when students realize that older people have plenty to share with them.

How You Can Get Involved

Visit classrooms to discuss your profession. First, second, and third graders enjoy a kind of professional "show and tell" when members of Louisiana's Minden AARP Chapter 1249 visit classrooms to discuss their professions and other aspects of their lives. Part of a foster grandparent program set up by the school, the project broadens the children's horizons and gives them access to firsthand experience. Each month during the school year, a chapter coordinator checks a list of about 20 potential chapter volunteers and assembles a roster of six who will each go into a classroom to discuss whatever they like. The coordinator contacts teachers to set up a time and leaves herself free to cover any unexpected absences. With the teacher present to handle any discipline problems, the volunteer talks for about half an hour and then takes questions. A former railroad engineer appeared clad in the uniform he wore when he first started working. One volunteer brought in a cotton boll to illustrate her tales of picking cotton as a child. Another displayed a collection of old tools and demonstrated their use.



Serve on a speakers bureau. Members of California's Camarillo AARP Chapter 3166 and other older people participate in a speakers bureau designed to enrich the curriculum of the county's schools. Sponsored by the school system, the speakers bureau gives older volunteers the opportunity to address students on an ever-changing roster of topics. Once a year, a school system coordinator contacts potential volunteers at senior centers, service organizations, and the chapter and asks them what topics they would like to advertise in the speakers bureau brochure. Volunteers specify the length and grade level of their proposed talks and their preferred times and geographical areas. Volunteers may repeat topics from the previous year or branch out into new realms

that explore other aspects of their lives, such as hobbies or trips. One chapter volunteer, for instance, is currently available to speak on musicology or communication arts but plans to use his experience as a radar engineer to prepare a talk on radar for next year. The school system distributes the brochure to teachers, who then consult the four-page listing when they feel a speaker would add to their classes. A man who escaped from a Nazi concentration camp, for example, is often called upon to address classes studying World War II. A former aeronautical engineer uses models of spacecraft to illustrate his discussion of space exploration. Former accountants, engineers, foresters, lawyers, teachers, salespeople, and even a gold miner are available to discuss their careers. Topics range from California's judicial system to the labor movement, from careers to travelogues. Giving two weeks advance notice, teachers get the telephone numbers of volunteers from the coordinator. The program works according to free market principles. Thus, one very popular speaker from the chapter has responded to more than 20 requests in one semester alone.

Resources

To work in schools, call your school district's school board or the volunteer coordinator at the superintendent's office to discuss your ideas. If you have a specific school in mind, contact the principal. Make an appointment to discuss their needs and what you're willing to do. The National Association of Partners in Education (NAPE) publishes *How to Organize and Manage Intergenerational Partnership Programs*, a guide that can help you set up a program for sharing your experiences with students. For a catalog and more information, contact NAPE at 209 Madison Street, Suite 401, Alexandria, VA 22314 or call (703) 836-4880.

Rewarding Academic Excellence

The success of good grades is often a secret shared only by those with access to a student's report card—the child, the parents, and the teachers. Even in schools where honor rolls reward academic success, the honor occasionally consists only of lists of names posted in out of the way locations in crowded school hallways. Often coupled with this restrained recognition on the part of school officials is a mentality among students that labels their more intellectually oriented peers as "egg-heads" or other similarly derogatory terms. To many chapters and units, this situation contrasts unfavorably with the fanfare awarded student athletes. Where, they wonder, are the pep clubs and parades for academic achievers? Realizing that students need public encouragement for their academic as well as their athletic endeavors, many volunteers work to reward students for their intellectual

successes. You can, too. Have a party for students with all kinds of academic success stories. Sponsor a spelling-bee. Or consult the descriptions below to learn how other groups have tackled the issue.

How to Encourage Academic Success

Sponsor a writing contest. Concerned about the level of writing skills in a state with a huge immigrant population, the Hawaii State Retired Teachers Association (HSRTA) decided to do something. They got involved in a state-wide writing contest for public school children sponsored by the Hawaii Education Association (HEA), which includes most of HSRTA's members.

Students in grades one through 12 compete with essays, poetry, and short stories. HEA grants prizes ranging from $5 to $100 and honors winners at a public gathering. The first three winners in each category and age group recite their entries before joining their families and HSRTA and HEA members for a banquet. HEA pays the transportation and lodging costs of the winners and their parents or teachers. As an additional honor, winning entries are published in a book distributed to participants and libraries and sold for $5.00 to others. In 1990, approximately 1,500 students participated. The cost? About $10,000.

How do they do it? Extremely well-established and well-funded, HEA has five full-time staffers who take care of sending out flyers, official guidelines, notifications, and all the other correspondence the contest entails. Public school teachers do the initial judging, after being flown at HEA's expense to Honolulu for a seminar on standards. A 15-person committee, comprised of public school teachers and HSRTA members does the final judging. But don't be put off if your association doesn't have 5,000 members and a net worth in the millions. As HSRTA's president points out, this project can work just as well on a much smaller, simpler scale.

Sponsor an academic competition. Believing that students should be able to compete in more than just sports, about 75 members of the California Retired Teachers Association's Division 39 got involved in a series of academic competitions sponsored by a county office of education and a county math council. Some members coach teams of students selected by their teachers to represent their schools in a Science Olympiad, Math Steeplechase, and Academic Decathlon. Others serve as judges at the events, each of which occurs at a different time of year and involves a different age group. And still more staff stations that feature a different problem or activity participants must complete before continuing. One math steeplechase activity, for instance, has students solving problems whose answers form the

combination to padlocks. Teams earn points according to how many padlocks they open during a set amount of time. Other volunteers total points, judge speeches given by students and interview them as part of the competition, or entertain students who are waiting to compete with demonstrations of things like the mathematic principles behind bubble blowing.

The only real background work the unit needs to do is to recruit volunteers. A unit coordinator distributes a survey inviting members to check off activities listed and then forwards names to the office of education and the math council. In the case of the Science Olympiad and the Academic Decathlon, a consultant hired by the office of education coordinates participation, arranges the sites, solicits corporate sponsorship, and provides meals and awards, while the chapter attends steering committee meetings and supplies volunteers for the events. The math council coordinates the Math Steeplechase but looks to the unit for financial, as well as volunteer, support.

Resources

To set up an academic competition involving more than one school, contact your school district's superintendent, school board, or volunteer coordinator. If you have one school or a single class in mind, contact the principal or teacher directly. Make an appointment to discuss your idea, what you're willing to do, and how they can help you.

Providing Financial Support

Before the days of big cuts in education funding, schools' efforts to raise money were focused on buying extras like a new gymnasium or flowers for the school's front lawn. Today, however, many schools must struggle to provide even the necessities for their students. While the price of textbooks, heating oil, and everything else has gone up, funding from federal, state, and local sources has decreased. And as the number of American households without school aged children increases, financial support will continue to diminish. Your group can help by participating in schools' fundraising efforts and by sponsoring your own. Hold a bake sale or rummage sale. Encourage local stores to redeem your group's cash register receipts for items like computers once you reach a certain amount. Ask businesses and other service organizations to donate money or materials. Or work with students, helping them to organize a car wash or a crafts fair featuring items made by both generations. Check the entries below to see how other units and chapters raise money and spend their earnings.

What You Can Do

Donate materials or money. So many chapters and units make contri-

butions to schools, it's impossible to list them. Usually drawing from their group's general treasury, chapters and units donate school supplies, subscriptions to children's magazines, and art supplies. They provide shoes, coats, and other clothes to children who lack them and thus can't come to school. Some develop, or purchase, educational materials on safety for fire departments to use with young students. Others sponsor events, such as alcohol-free graduation parties for high school seniors. Ask students what they need and use your imagination.

Grant scholarships. Many chapters and units give financial support directly to students, most frequently to high school seniors who plan to study teaching, nursing, therapy, gerontology, or other areas of concern to members. Maine's York County Retired Teachers Association, for instance, concentrates almost exclusively on raising funds from among its members to support five annual $500 scholarships. The unit depends on a ways and means committee of two people to organize the unit's highly successful fundraising events. Each month, the committee offers a donated item to be raffled off at the unit's meeting. Often crafted by a member, these objects have included wallhangings, paintings, and handcrafted purses. Although objects are sometimes held for three consecutive meetings and can, in that way, bring in as much as $500, the unit usually draws names at the end of a meeting as a way to encourage members to stay longer. "Every time members come in for a regular meeting, we squire them right to the ways and means table," admits the unit's president. "They're too embarrassed to walk by without giving anything." The unit also buys brooms, knives, and other kitchen tools at a discount and sells them to members for a small profit. The biggest fundraiser, however, is an annual bazaar organized by another unit committee. Tables laden with baked goods, "white elephants," plants, and crafts donated by members are staffed by members. The fair occurs during a regular unit meeting; although the event is not advertised to the public, members are encouraged to bring friends. A regular business meeting follows the fair. The program? An auction selling off the fair's leftovers. Two gregarious members act as auctioneers and refuse to let any object remain unclaimed, no matter how little they finally get for it. The fair and auction usually bring in about $1,000.

Once the unit knows how much money it has to work with, it sets about awarding scholarships. Although most of its scholarships go to graduating seniors intent on entering nursing or teaching, the unit is expanding the scope of its program. Recently members have become interested in helping older students who are starting a degree or finishing an abandoned one. They're also interested in students going into vocational trades. The unit looks at the applicant's needs, goals, and potential. Geographical diversity is

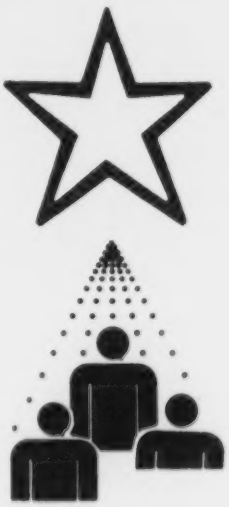
also important. The half dozen members of the scholarship committee send information to all the high schools in the county, asking for nominations from both within and outside the school system. Once the materials come back, the committee makes its decisions and notifies the schools. Recipients are honored by their schools at graduation and receive the scholarship once they have started their new programs. All the unit asks is that recipients write to them during the first semester to say how things are going. "It's not a lot of money," says the chapter's president, "but if it can pay for high-price textbooks, it's a good help to them."

Resources

The National VOLUNTEER Center's catalog lists many publications dealing with fundraising, including *101 Ways to Raise Resources* and *The Grass Roots Fundraising Book: How to Raise Money in Your Community.* For a catalog, write to The National VOLUNTEER Center at 1111 North 19th Street, Suite 500, Arlington, VA 22209 or call (703) 276-0542. Your local library or bookstore may have other guides.

Working Toward Better Education

Even though older people no longer have school aged children doesn't mean that they no longer want to support schools with their votes and their tax dollars. On the contrary, many chapters and units work actively to inform their members and their elected representatives about education issues. They also make vocal their support of bond issues and property taxes that allow schools to hire more teachers, build better facilities, and purchase supplies. These chapters know that paying for better education is cheaper in the long run than supporting the many social services that poorly educated people must rely upon when faced with minimum wage jobs or unemployment. The chapters and units involved also realize that supporting schools is an investment in their own future, since today's schoolchildren will one day have to support programs, like Social Security that help older Americans.



Your representatives—whether in the city council, state legislature, or United States Congress—will only know how you feel about education if you tell them. You can help by writing brief letters that provide information and express your viewpoint to the editor of your local newspaper and to your representatives. Invite a member of your State Legislative Committee or Capital City Task Force (see Resources) to tell your group about legislative priorities in your state. And see the project

descriptions below to find about out how other groups have worked toward better education for today's students.

How to Get Involved

Get informed about the issues. Concerned about cutbacks in funding for education, Missouri's Polk County Retired Teachers Association invited representatives from the school board to discuss problems and possible solutions at a regular unit meeting. To show their support of bond issues designed to improve school buildings and allow the hiring of extra teachers, members also met with the school board.

Take your concerns to the state legislature. A two-person legislative committee gets the whole membership of the Caldwell County Retired Teachers Association involved in lobbying the Texas legislature on education issues. The committee discusses legislative issues at unit meetings, using their own research and reports from AARP's State Legislative Committee to keep informed. If something important comes up between meetings, they get on the phone "to get the power moving" as one committee member puts it. When the legislature is in session and issues of concern are coming up, the legislative committee coordinator organizes groups to travel to the capitol and make their position known. The unit members check in at their legislators' offices, presenting their case to legislative aides or speaking directly with the representatives if the matter is urgent. Other members call their representatives to express their opinions. One legislative committee member was even invited to spend four months as an education consultant to a legislator. Three or four times a week, the member spent about four hours coordinating communication between the legislator and school superintendents. He also sat in on discussions and advised the legislator, drawing on a long career as a superintendent himself. The unit's approach clearly works. Their latest cause, a financial restructuring of the state's schools that would give poor districts more state funding and rich ones less, passed.

Resources

AARP sponsors a State Legislative Committee (SLC) in every state. Guided by the Association's Board of Directors and the National Legis-lative Council, volunteers in the SLCs work to educate state legislators. The SLCs frequently distribute lists of legislative priorities and other communications to chapters and units in an effort to coordinate legislative efforts. AARP also sponsors a Capital City Task Force in every state. Ask your chapter or unit's legislative committee chairperson or president for the names of the SLC chairperson and task force members in your state. For more information, order a free copy of AARPs brochure *Making Your State Government Work for You* (D13268) from AARP Fulfillment, 601 E Street, NW, Washington, DC 20049. For more

detailed information, order a free copy of AARPs brochure *State Legislative Priorities and Facts for You to Remember*. Be sure to indicate what state interests you.

Check your local library or bookstore for books explaining how the legislative system works and how you can affect legislation through your lobbying efforts. Your librarian can also help you find the addresses and phone numbers of your representatives.

III. Programs For Adult Learners

Helping Students Earn High School Equivalencies

According to the American Council on Education, more than 25 percent of students leave school without earning a high school diploma. Without this degree, they face diminished earnings, severely limited employment opportunities, and lifetimes of low self-esteem. Yet many dropouts who want to return to school cannot. They may be trapped in minimum wage jobs that won't allow them to take time off for education. Or the high cost of child care, running to thousands of dollars a year in some areas, may make returning to school an impossible dream. Fortunately, a way exists for these people to acquire the credentials they need for finding work at a higher level or even entering college. Rather than re-enroll in a regular high school, these people can take a General Educational Development (GED) exam.

Sponsored by the American Council on Education and state departments of education, the GED program gives would-be students a chance to earn the equivalent of a high school education in a seven hour exam given frequently at thousands of sites. Examinees must demonstrate proficiency in writing, social studies, science, literature and the arts, and mathematics. Although about 20 percent take the test with no specific preparation, most study in some way. Self-study books, for instance, are widely available in bookstores and libraries, and many public television stations have GED instructional programs. One of the most successful methods, however, is to enroll in a GED class. Available in almost every community, classes are generally held in the evening or on weekends. Although these classes go a long way toward helping dropouts, students still need your help. You can give further support by providing day care or transportation, by serving as a tutor, or by publicizing your community's program.

How You Can Help

Offer day care services to students who are parents. No special training is necessary for this project, only the instincts of a grandparent. So says a member of Florida's St. Cloud AARP Chapter 4001 who cares for the babies of unwed mothers while they attend classes. Responding to the invitation of a chapter member already involved in the project, about half a dozen chapter members now spend a few hours a month at a day care center run by the county's board of education. There they rock babies, comfort toddlers, and help out the

two staff members who oversee the 40 or so children who are likely to be there at one time. The mothers, who learn parenting skills as part of their special GED program, are in a schoolroom right next door. Notes one volunteer, "They can use all the help they can get."

Tutor students preparing for the GED. Rural Arizona is home to many transient farmworkers, high school dropouts, and minority members at the lower end of the socio-economic scale. In Graham County alone, the illiteracy rate is about 35 percent. But if members of the Graham-Greenlee unit of the Arizona Retired Teachers Association have their way, these numbers will soon reflect a different state of affairs. About five unit members help people study for their GED exams in a program that also provides training in literacy, Adult Basic Education, English as a Second Language, and job-seeking skills. As a first step, volunteers participate in a 20-hour training program that teaches them how to build rapport with students, how to understand their situation, and how to avoid judgemental attitudes toward them. Guided by paid teachers, volunteers attend two-and-a-half-hour classes twice a week to tutor students in math, science, reading, and whatever else they need to pass the GED exam. They also help give and score practice tests.

The program is coordinated by the teachers involved, with help from the local library and college. Initial funding for the program came with an $8,000 federal grant to the library for developing a literacy program. The college's continuing education department provides funds for teachers' salaries and other costs, supplies them with a computer-assisted literacy program, and coordinates grants. The library provides space in its social services center. The program recruits volunteers by word of mouth among the unit, other teachers' groups, and the community at large.

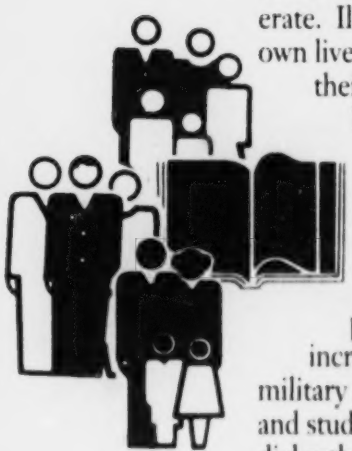
Resources

To find a GED class in your community, look in the telephone directory under "GED," "high school equivalency," or "adult education." Or call your local high school, community college, or school board. If no information is available locally, call the state department of education and ask for the adult education director or GED administrator. The Contact Literacy Center can also give you the name and telephone number of the GED program nearest you. Call their toll-free number at (800) 228-8813. Or write them at P.O. Box 81826, Lincoln, Nebraska 68501.

AARP's free brochure *Wish You Had Finished High School?* (D13048) provides more information about the GED. Order it from AARP Fulfillment, 601 E Street, NW, Washington, DC 20049.

Conquering Illiteracy

"I learned myself out of my shame," says one victor in the fight against illiteracy. But the battle is far from won. The United States Department of Education estimates that twenty percent of this country's adults cannot read and that another 34 percent possess only marginal skills. Sixty percent of the nation's prisoners are illiterate. Illiterate people endanger their own lives and those of others through their inability to read medicine labels, warnings, or traffic signs. Illiteracy accounts for much of the nation's unemployment and underemployment, a problem that increases as the complexity of the workplace increases. It leads to ill-prepared military recruits, uninformed voters, and students forced to focus on remedial rather than new skills. And it sets in place a self-perpetuating cycle in which parents cannot help their children learn to read. An often hidden handicap, illiteracy is everywhere. Do members of your community need help?



What Can Be Done

Encourage your group's members to become literacy tutors. The best way to encourage member involvement is to invite a speaker from a local literacy project to address your group. Call the Contact Literacy Center's toll-free number (see Resources) for the name and telephone number of the program nearest you.

Teach reading to inmates. Feeling that something should be done to help jail inmates and people on probation re-enter the community as productive citizens, a small-town sheriff in Texas went to Bertha Taylor for help in setting up an "education release" program. A former reading teacher and member of the Graham Area Retired Teachers Association, Taylor agreed to help him set up a literacy program that occurs outside the jail environment and involves the whole community. Enlisting active schoolteachers, as well as retired educators to be volunteers, she used people who had already been trained by a local Laubach Literacy Action (see Resources) affiliate to train the new recruits. The local library loans workbooks, manuals, and a training film. The school system provides a meeting space in a centralized location. Unit members bake cookies or make sandwiches that are served during breaks.

Required to participate in education activities as a condition for work release privileges, prisoners are brought to the site twice a week for two-hour-long sessions with tutors. Students begin with reading and move on to math, history, or any other subject they need to pass the General Educational Development exam. About 20 students passed the test in the program's first year alone. And some inmates get so good that they become tutors, too.

Set up a literacy program. Concerned about the lack of literacy opportunities in her rural Georgia community, Elbert County Retired Teachers Association member Betty Williford traveled to a neighboring county to hear an informational talk by a literacy volunteer. What she heard was so inspiring that she promptly set up a model program in her own county. She enlisted four friends and went to a nearby town for training by a Literacy Volunteers of America (LVA) group (see Resources). The fledgling group solicited and trained 20 more volunteers drawn from their own association, Elbert County AARP Chapter 2584 and Elbert Graniteers AARP Chapter 3052, religious and civic groups, the library, parent-teacher associations, and the business community. They applied for affiliation with LVA, a status that gives them technical and training support as well as automatic nonprofit status. Their goal? To involve the entire community in the task of transforming all 7,344 of Elbert County's illiterates into readers by the year 2000.

Their Hometown Education Renewal Opportunity (HERO) program has done just that since it began in 1985. HERO's tutors started teaching in a classroom borrowed from the local school board. The school system let them use a school's mailing address and donated secretarial service; a library provided access to a telephone and a place to store their supplies. When the program overflowed, program administrators solicited more donations and asked a technical school for help with grant applications. The resulting funds bought a library of teaching materials, a video cassette recorder and teaching programs, a computer system with literacy software, and a day care facility for students' children. Funds from civic clubs and businesses pay for a full-time, professional staff to supplement tutors. To house it all, the school board gave them a 5,000 square foot facility renovated with volunteer labor and donated materials. The board also pays the utilities. Everything—from the services of an accountant who acts as a volunteer treasurer to the sign outside—is donated. "Explain your program and your needs, and you'll nearly always get positive results," says Williford. "Expect the best and most folks will come through."

The community donates time and effort, as well as materials. Each segment of the community, such as businesses or the media, has its own committee in charge of recruitment and action. Tutors contact the parents of Head Start children and seek out National Guard members who lack a high school education. They even visit newborn infants to give them books and tell their mothers how important literacy is. Teachers ask parents to read with their children; social workers and probation officers identify illiterate juvenile and adult offenders. Businesses recruit tutors and students by funding brochures and distributing them in the paycheck envelopes of all major employers, at

fair booths, at public agencies, at doctors' offices, and at club meetings. Businesses also sponsor literacy awareness weeks and city-wide poster campaigns. The newspaper features weekly articles, and public service announcements frequently air on the radio. All this good work does not go unrewarded. Organizations that get ten percent of their members involved in learning or supporting learners each year receive an embossed certificate. Individuals who put in at least 100 hours as students or tutors, recruit at least six participants, donate at least $200, or help out in many other ways earn a HERO badge. As people and organizations vie for HERO status, Elbert County seems well on its way to becoming a truly literate community.

Resources

To get a feel for the problem, read Jonathan Kozol's *Illiterate America*. A classic about illiteracy, this $9.95 paperback book is widely available at bookstores and libraries.

For the name and telephone number of the literacy project closest to you, call the Contact Literacy Center's toll-free number at (800) 228-8813. You may also write for their free brochures on topics ranging from fundraising, to tutoring, to publicity at P.O. Box 81826, Lincoln, Nebraska 68501. You may also order AARP's free brochure called *Making America Literate* (D12755) for a list of other literacy organizations. Write to AARP Fulfillment, 601 E Street, NW, Washington, DC 20049.

Two of the best known literacy programs are Literacy Volunteers of America and Laubach Literacy Action. Literacy Volunteers of America is a national organization that uses a network of community programs to fight illiteracy. After an 18-hour training workshop, tutors teach individuals or small groups reading or English as a Second Language. LVA can also provide technical assistance and a variety of materials to programs. Write to Literacy Volunteers of America at 5795 Widewaters Parkway, Syracuse, NY 13214 or call (315) 445-8000. Laubach Literacy Action is a similar organization. Write to their Information Center in care of Department A, 1320 Jamesville Avenue, Box 131, Syracuse, NY 13210 or call (315) 422-9121.

If no program exists in your area, you may wish to set up your own. Contact local educational institutions, community centers, religious organizations, libraries, and the Retired Senior Volunteer Program. Work with your community's provider of Adult Basic Education to coordinate services. Technical schools, community colleges, and other types of educational institutions may be able to help you with grant applications and administration. If you plan to work with prisoners, write to the International Association of Justice Volunteerism in care of the Criminal Justice Institute, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, P.O. Box 786, Milwaukee, WI 53201 or call (414) 229-6092.

Teaching English As A Second Language

Literacy Volunteers of America estimates that more than three and a half million people in this country have limited English, with another half million a year entering the country as legal immigrants. Factor into that an unknown number of illegal immigrants and long-time residents who have never learned English, and you've got a problem. Although many immigrants are highly educated and fluent in multiple languages, their inability to speak English prevents them from sharing their skills. They may not be able to read traffic signs, apply for social services, or explain problems to emergency personnel. They cannot become American citizens. And they don't instill the new language in their children, resulting in schools where children may speak dozens of languages but have none in common with their teachers. Although they may have created a supportive community among themselves, these non-English speaking residents cannot participate in the cultural mainstream of this country.

Fortunately, English as a Second Language (ESL) programs have proliferated around the country. Using many of the same techniques as literacy trainers, ESL tutors work to improve the speaking and writing skills of newcomers to English. You can help by becoming a tutor, enrolling and placing students, or providing day care and transportation services. You don't need any special skills, just tolerance and an open mind.

How You Can Get Involved

Become an ESL tutor. Georgian Hoevel started out as a literacy tutor. But when a Chinese family took over the restaurant next door to her, this member of Indiana's Fort Wayne AARP Chapter 187 found a reason to focus her attention on ESL. Motivated by a sense of neighborly friendliness, she discovered that the family's son was having trouble in college. "His professors were really knocking the dickens out of him," she explains. "They were after him for skipping words or using wrong endings." Drawing on her training at the local literacy alliance, she began her work teaching English to newly arrived immigrants from China.

Working with that first student set a pattern. Hoevel coaches students in word pronunciation and comprehension. She supervises homework sessions and helps students write essays. She encourages students to put their thoughts down on paper and then edits for them, going over the result sentence by sentence. Often she finds a magazine article she thinks will interest a student and uses it as the basis of a reading lesson. When students start college, she escorts them to registration and encourages them

to take lots of composition classes. A recent sideline has been to help students prepare for the citizenship test, concentrating on the oral examination. She helps candidates fill out the paperwork and ensures that they understand everything. All tutoring is informal, scheduled around the classes and work hours of her students. New students are drawn by word of mouth in the Chinese community; old students keep in close touch with the woman they think of as a grandmother.

Sensitivity is key. Hoevel points out that many new immigrants are highly educated, and tutors must respect that. "Their pride is a barrier you must break through," she notes. "A lot of them don't want the neighborhood to know they're being tutored." The secret to her success? "You have to approach them very slowly and gain their confidence," she says. When she needs support, Hoevel turns to the literacy alliance. She attends workshops, consults colleagues about problems, and meets with other tutors to "bounce ideas around." And in an effort to attract more tutors, she urges literacy alliance spokespeople to address chapter meetings and gladly shares her own success stories.

Resources

To find out whether there is an ESL program in your community, contact the adult education program of public schools or the state office of refugee resettlement. Or call the Contact Literacy Center for the name of the program nearest you. Call toll-free at (800) 228-8813.

Literacy Volunteers of America (LVA) and Laubach Literacy Action include ESL as part of their general literacy programs. Both groups coordinate networks of community programs and provide training and technical assistance to tutors, who may work with individuals or small groups. Write to LVA at 5795 Widewaters Parkway, Syracuse, NY 13214 or call (315) 445-8000. Write to Laubach's Information Center in care of Department A, 1320 Jamesville Avenue, Box 131, Syracuse, NY 13210 or call (315) 422-9121.

IV. PROGRAMS FOR OLDER LEARNERS

USING AARP MATERIALS

Would your members be interested in a seminar on health care reform? Publications explaining the details of Social Security? A video about crime prevention? One of the easiest ways to promote lifelong learning is to make educational programs an essential part of your chapter or unit meetings. AARP makes it simple to do. An annual catalog called *AARP Publications and A/V Programs: The Complete Collection* describes hundreds of publications and audio-visual programs available from the Association (see Resources). Typically, each audio-visual program includes slides and a cassette tape or a video cassette, a list of publications you can order to hand out at the presentation, and suggestions for using the program. All you need to do is order the materials, present them according to the directions, sit back, and learn. You could even invite speakers to round out the program. See the project description below to find out how one chapter used AARP materials to present an outstanding program.

What You Can Do

Use AARP's resources to present programs for older learners.

Flipping through the *AARP Publications and A/V Programs* catalog, members of Covington AARP Chapter 3542's Health Committee got inspired. After seeing the materials available, these rural Georgia residents immediately decided to sponsor a program called "Eating Healthy" at a regular chapter meeting. Several months before the meeting, the committee ordered the appropriate slide-tape program, workbooks, and place mats decorated with a quiz from the catalog. Although all AARP's audio-visual programs are available on a free loan basis, the chapter decided to purchase the slides and tape so that other groups could use them for their own programs. A $100 one-time special initiative grant was awarded to the chapter by the AARP Area Office for its health programs. This paid for the slides, workbooks, and other costs. Then the committee invited a home economist from the extension service to present the program. When the materials arrived, the committee forwarded them to the home economist and explained what sort of program they wanted and what sort of equipment they needed. At the chapter's next luncheon meeting, the speaker not only showed up with the extension service's slide projector but also with samples of low-sodium treats like banana bread and vegetable dip she had made the night before. Although chapter members eagerly

devoured the food and the tips on healthy cooking, the program did not eat into the chapter's budget. In fact, they had money left over from their grant and used it to buy food for five needy seniors the chapter sponsors.

Resources

Order *AARP Publications and A/V Programs: The Complete Collection* (C48) from AARP Fulfillment, 601 E Street, NW, Washington, DC 20049. The Association produces dozens of publications and a wide variety of audio-visual programs on topics ranging from criminal justice to consumer education to energy. Audio-visual programs are available on a free-loan basis or for purchase at low cost. You must order programs at least 60 days in advance. Ordering instructions are included in the catalog.

PROMOTING LIFELONG LEARNING

Lots of people succumb to the belief that childhood should be dedicated to education, adulthood to work, and the later years to leisure. Yet many don't conform to this model of life. Three million people in this country alone, for instance, have never attended school at all. Some workers return to school in the middle of their careers, either to learn new skills or sharpen old ones. And hundreds of thousands of older people each year participate in learning activities. So if you feel like your education is incomplete, you want to master a particular subject, or you just want a fun way to meet new people, don't let anyone persuade you that learning is just for the young. Study on your own, take classes, and encourage other people to get involved. See the project descriptions below for ideas on how to promote lifelong learning.

How to Get Involved

Encourage your members to participate in continuing education programs. When the president of Montana's Billings AARP Chapter 231 heard about the Elderhostel (see Resources) classes being offered at a local college campus, she became intrigued. To get more information for herself and her fellow chapter members, she invited one of the instructors to tell them about the program at one of the chapter's regular meetings. After enthusiastically explaining Elderhostel and describing some of the courses available locally, the speaker distributed catalogs and applications. The only thing left to do was decide: a program on the area's fossils, a course about Montana's native peoples, or some other fascinating topic?

Serve on an advisory council of an educational institution. Having taken a number of classes at a branch of the University of Alaska, a member of Ketchikan AARP Chapter 1825 decided to get involved in education from a policy standpoint. She approached the branch's advisory council, which makes all the decisions about how the school will be run.

Soon after she found herself a member of the nine-person group. Although she participates fully in all the council's activities, her focus is on acting as a liaison between the university and the chapter. She reports the chapter's concerns to the council, passing on members' suggestions for new classes, reporting on their educational activities, and expressing their support of a fee waiver that grants persons age 60 and over a free education. And she fills the chapter in on the council's activities. Council meetings take up only a few hours once a month, although she does supplement her council activities by lobbying a neighbor who is a state legislator. As a result of this close link between council and chapter, the council allows the chapter to use its forum room for meetings.

Create a directory of lifelong learning opportunities. Learning opportunities are useless if no one is aware of them. Members of the Lorain County Retired Teachers Association helped solve that problem in their Ohio community by getting involved in the production and distribution of a directory of lifelong learning. Conceived by unit member Ethel Rohrbach as part of a community-wide improvement project, the *Life-Long Non-Credit Learning Directory* lists about 50 pages worth of programs ranging from scuba diving to budget counseling, from an Afro-American Festival to an inventors' council. A committee of 11 volunteers, aided by a paid secretary, produces the directory, which has had seven issues since the project's beginning in 1985. For a summer issue, the committee gets together at Rohrbach's dining room table in February and sends inquiries with self-addressed, stamped envelopes and a strict deadline to the area's schools, social service providers, nonprofit organizations, and businesses. The volunteers compile the responses as they are received. In May, the local newspaper designs the issue. In June, the committee joins volunteers from the local Retired Senior Volunteer Program in assembling the directory in a volunteer's family room and distributing the 30,000 copies to 150 different drop-off points.

The response has been so good that the committee hopes to increase funding levels in order to hire an administrator and give the directory a home of its own. Currently, funding comes from a small fee charged to organizations listed in the directory and from grants given by community foundations, businesses, and schools. The newspaper, for example, charges only for newsprint and out-of-house binding. Although many of the project's funding sources require formal proposals at first, after a while an informal discussion of needs will do. "Once they get to know you," says Rohrbach, "they want to help you."

Resources

Public and private schools, colleges, universities, trade schools, libraries, museums, senior centers, and religious organizations are all likely sources of lifelong learning opportunities. Ask whether courses are credit or noncredit, whether older people receive discounts or waivers on fees, whether daytime classes are available, and whether you can audit regular classes.

Elderhostel sponsors week-long or longer programs for people over age 60, companions over age 50, and spouses of any age at 1,600 colleges, universities, and other institutions in the United States and abroad. Schedules usually feature three classes a day taught by the institution's own faculty and plenty of free time. There are no exams or grades, just an emphasis on learning something new among newfound peers. Participants usually live in campus dorm rooms with shared bathrooms and dine in campus cafeterias. The average price of $285 per week covers registration, classes, lodging, meals, and entertainment for domestic programs; international programs cost about $3,000 for two- to three-week programs, including airfare. Some scholarships are available. For Elderhostel's quarterly catalogues, write to 75 Federal Street, Boston, MA 02110-1941 or call (617) 426-8056. For a sometimes critical guide to 220 campuses and their programs, read *Elderhostels: The Students' Choice* by Mildred Hyman. Published by John Muir, Inc., this $15.95 book is available in bookstores and libraries.

If you want to approach the issue of lifelong learning from a policy standpoint, order a free copy of AARP's brochure *So You Want to Get Appointed to a Board or Commission* (D12155) or AARP's step-by-step manual *How to Get Appointed to a Board or Commission: A Guide for Older Citizens* (D880) from AARP Fulfillment, 601 E Street, NW, Washington, DC 20049.

Bridging The Generation Gap

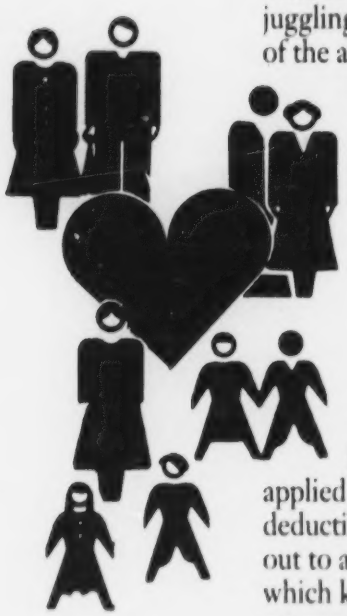
The American family is one of the most mobile social groups in the history of humanity. Although this willingness to follow better jobs into any geographic area often results in increased economic well-being, it also means a breakdown of the traditional extended family. Children and their grandparents may meet only rarely, if at all. And older people living in retirement communities or other places populated only by their peers often have no opportunity to meet young people. Volunteers can help bridge this generational gap. Serving in the role of substitute grandparents, volunteers can pass on cultural traditions, values, and skills. They can help break down stereotypes, both of children and of themselves. And by working with children, they take us full circle back to where this book began.

What Your Group Can Do

Invite young people to your meetings. Many chapters invite foreign exchange students, learning disabled students, and sometimes even entire music departments to their meetings. In the case of California's San Bernardino AARP Chapter 2083, the guests were 20 elementary school-aged members of a junior police academy. After seeing the kids on a community cable television show, the chapter's program committee invited them to a regular chapter meeting. The children first explained their program, which is designed to provide community service opportunities and social experiences to disadvantaged 10- to 12-year-olds. Then they performed a short drill and joined chapter members at lunch. The children were scattered among the tables to maximize their contact with older people. "That way we didn't end up with a table of giggling boys," says one chapter member. "They had to interact with us."

Form an intergenerational chorus. Helping eighth graders learn about music and life is what the Intergenerational Music Ensemble is all about. Recruited by a school music teacher, 15 members of Pennsylvania's North Penn AARP Chapter 407 joined other older singers and 52 students in a chorus whose members range in age from 14 to 84. When the group gets together each year, they first spend a while in small groups just talking and getting to know each other. Then the work begins. One afternoon a week for two months, the chorus rehearses together at the school auditorium. Then they perform at a school choral concert and at a chapter meeting. The older members, who include retired music teachers, direct some of the segments, introduce songs, and even jitterbug during the big band finale. The youngsters not only learn from hearing experienced singers but make new friends across the generations.

Put on a show at schools. With a goal of showing children that age doesn't spell the end of fun and agility, a 15-person troupe called the Super Seniors visits elementary schools in Oregon to perform at assemblies. Conceived by Deschutes County Retired Educators Association member Betty Fairham, the troupe draws on the unit's membership as well as the wider community. The only requirement is that participants be 55 or older. You don't even have to be talented; Fairham will teach prospective members tap-dancing, clogging, and whatever other skills are needed. Although Fairham originally ran the program on her own, a five-person executive committee now meets about once a week to discuss programming. A coordinator arranges performances by contacting school principals, a process that usually takes only minutes since schools are so eager to have them. Generally, a stage manager is in charge of the performance, while a retired audio technician handles the technical aspects. The group gets together once a week for about three hours to rehearse, and members are encouraged to practice on their own. A fraternal organization lets them use their facilities for free. Once a month,



the troupe visits a school to perform a vaudeville-style act that manages to include a magician, rap music, clowns, juggling, a puppet, and even members of the audience. The group also performs for private groups, charging them a fee to cover their expenses. And they are about to do their first benefit performance, hoping to raise money for a young bone marrow transplant patient.

The program has been so successful in its first year that the group applied for nonprofit status. Tax deductible donations are now made out to a regional council on aging, which keeps a separate Super Seniors account for expenses such as costumes and shoes, audio equipment, and gas. A liaison from the council attends the executive committee's meetings. The program also applied to a regional arts council, which matched donations up to a specified limit.

Participate in an intergenerational conference. Long Beach Island AARP Chapter 3728 in New Jersey participated in an intergenerational conference called "Building Bridges" at a high school. A community relations effort, funded by a state council on aging and facilitated by a member of a college's gerontology advisory board, "Building Bridges" helps explain why people with no school-aged children should support the school's multi-million dollar budget. More importantly, it facilitates communication among generations. A school administrator organized the program, recruiting older participants from the chapter and a local senior center. For half a day, 40 students, 32 chapter members, 8 parents, and a consultant examined attitudes, myths, and stereotypes. Students escorted visitors to computer labs, classes, and a working lunch in the school's cafeteria. The conference included brainstorming sessions in which participants thought of more ways to bridge the gap, like inviting older people to become tutors or resource people and younger people to perform at chapter meetings. By the end of the day, one participant reported, teens seemed less threatening and lazy and the older people less grouchy and uncaring.

Resources

The National Association of Partners in Education (NAPE) publishes *How to Organize and Manage Intergenerational Partnership Programs.* For a catalog and more information about how NAPE can help you set up a program, write to 209 Madison Street, Suite 401, Alexandria, VA 22314 or call (703) 836-4880.

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Special Projects Section

Program Coordination and
Development Department

AARP

American Association
Of Retired Persons
601 E Street, N.W.
Washington, DC 20049

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